

BACHELOR'S THESIS EXAMINER REPORT
PPE – Bachelor's in Politics, Philosophy and Economics
Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Thesis title:	Come War or High Water”: Investigating the Weaponization of Water through Manipulation of Dams in the Russia-Ukraine War (2014-2023)
Student's name:	Mariami Gavasheli
Referee's name:	Mgr. Vojtěch Bahenský, Ph.D.

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Contribution and argument (quality of research and analysis, originality)	50	30
	Research question (definition of objectives, plausibility of hypotheses)	15	10
	Theoretical framework (methods relevant to the research question)	15	10
<i>Total</i>		80	50
Minor Criteria			
	Sources, literature	10	8
	Presentation (language, style, cohesion)	5	4
	Manuscript form (structure, logical coherence, layout, tables, figures)	5	5
<i>Total</i>		20	17
TOTAL		100	67

Plagiarism-check (URKUND) match score:

TURNITIN reported an overall similarity of 26 %, but after manually checking, most of the similarity is in clearly marked citations. While there are some sentences which probably should have been marked as direct citations rather than mildly paraphrased, there is no reason to doubt the overall originality of the thesis.

Reviewer's commentary according to the above criteria (min. 1800 characters including spaces when recommending a passing grade, min. 2500 characters including spaces when recommending a failing grade):

The thesis addresses an interesting and what is more timely topic, studying very recent cases. The author has done a good job with exploring the literature surrounding the water weaponisation and specific legal aspects of protection of the water infrastructure. The style of the thesis is also good, even if at times too expressive and flowery for presenting research, especially when the language starts to obfuscate and confuse rather than clarify. At the same time, the thesis suffers from several problems of varying severity. The possibly most serious problem, most likely causing to a greater or a lesser extent all others, is the lack of focus and clear research objectives. The author repeats the research

objectives at many places of the thesis, but they are sometimes somewhat at odds with each other, and often rather vague (like “exploring the dynamic”).

The main objectives, to my best understanding, were to understand how the weaponisation provided the advantage to the weaponiser and what were the externalities of the weaponisation to both sides of the conflict (statements using the word “acceleration” were rather unclear to me, as I am not familiar with such concept in the context of conflict studies).

To achieve such an objective, the thesis lacks much literature on military and strategic aspects of conflicts, which would allow the author to make judgments about military utility. At the same time, the discussion of the international role and much of the theoretical framework and literature review seem ill-equipped to help in this quest and the role of IHL analysis in achieving the overarching objectives of the thesis is also unclear.

Indeed, in the analysis, the author tends toward assuming much (e.g. first discussing how unclear it is why and by whom the Khakovka dam was destroyed) to present one of the options and even clear specific intent as a fact in a few paragraphs below. Some statements are quite objectionable on the logical and factual basis (e.g. “Thus, restoring the water of water towards Crimea and blowing up the dam was the first military act on Russia’s warfare agenda.” – on page 32: restoration happened two days after the start of the invasion and was, therefore, quite clearly not the first military act, even if we accept that it is military act.). The military advantage obtained is judged essentially solely on the correlation of weaponisation and the immediate outcome of the fighting (Irpin – success, Mokri Yaly – failure), which is rather poor analysis that disregards many factors and any strategic dynamic on the ground.

Rather shallow analysis is a problem for the thesis overall. The case selection part does not explain from what universe of cases were the included case studies selected. While providing broad list of considerations for inclusion, it does not discuss how those considerations led to the inclusion of specific cases (or indeed the dismissal of other cases). Some of the observables are not very clearly tied to specific cases (e.g. overall costs of restoring water infrastructure vs. specific costs related to the Irpin case). Much of the findings could be considered somewhat banal (yes, dams can be weaponized to get military advantage; yes, this advantage is generally temporary and may not decide the outcome of the engagement of the operation; yes, blowing up dams does generally have ramifications down the road).

Irrespective of all the problems, the thesis can be praised for its ambition and fairly solid descriptive character, and overall, it does comply with the standards expected from the bachelor thesis.

Proposed grade: D

Suggested questions for the defence are:

I recommend the thesis for final defence.

Referee Signature

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Quality standard
91 – 100	A	= outstanding (high honor)

81 – 90	B	= superior (honor)
71 – 80	C	= good
61 – 70	D	= satisfactory
51 – 60	E	= low pass at a margin of failure
0 – 50	F	= failing. The thesis is not recommended for defence.